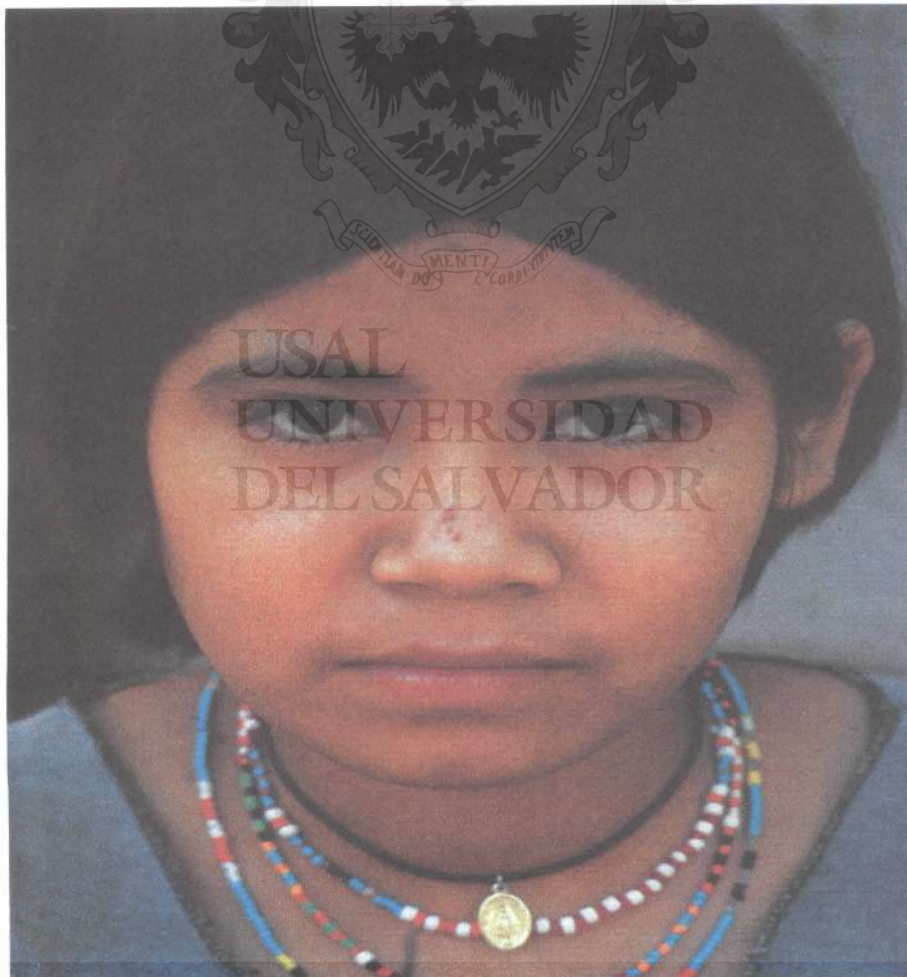


# "¿Qué vo queré?"

## Languages in Contact

The influence of Guaraní on the  
non-standard Argentinean Spanish in  
Posadas and surrounding areas



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## INTRODUCTION:

### THE USAGE OF NON-STANDARD ARGENTINEAN SPANISH IN MISIONES:

Although it could be accepted that the structures and processes that enable a language to develop are inborn, there is still a very important sense in which language is human-made: it is man's possession in a way that nothing else is. It is made up by man and the process of making it never stops ... *for language is one of the truly democratic forces left to man. It may be used as an instrument of oppression but it has the ability to turn on its handler. A good example is how international varieties of English are flourishing around the world in former colonies, from the Indian subcontinent to the Caribbean. Even in England many conservative speech patterns are themselves subtly changing under the influence of newly emergent accents...*<sup>1</sup>

However, there are rules in language; not rules imposed by academies, but the ones imposed by usage. ... *Thus, the way a language is structured, the way in which a language can be spoken or written coherently and acceptably is determined by how it is used...*<sup>2</sup> Moreover, the increasingly multicultural compositions of the language in a place like Posadas exhibit more linguistic diversity than ever before, taking into account the continuous waves of European immigrants since the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the people coming from other Argentinean provinces since the very foundation of Posadas. People use a wide range of non- mainstream language structures that reflect their sociolinguistic identities. Traditionally, variant language forms have been viewed simply as imperfect renditions of a more perfect standard and have, therefore, been targets for eradication. Over the past several decades, however, sociolinguistic research has indicated that variant language structures are highly systematic, following linguistic patterns that make them linguistically different rather than linguistically deficient forms of the mainstream language.

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<sup>1</sup>Finch, G. (1998). *How to Study Linguistics*. London: Macmillan Press Ltd.; Chapter 1

<sup>2</sup>. D'Onofrio C. (1999) *Non- standard Spanish in Misiones*. Paper written for the seminar on Bilingualism, delivered by Dr. Héctor Valencia at the USAL.

The province of Misiones is located in the Northeast of Argentina, lying geographically and geopolitically between a border with Paraguay and a border with Brazil (Fig. 1)<sup>3</sup> of about 1,000 km altogether and a border of 100 km with the province of Corrientes. In the areas near the Brazilian border, Brazilian-Portuguese is the predominant language of the people living there; therefore, it is easy to detect the great influence of both languages on each other, on both sides of the frontier. In the areas near the Paraguayan border, the majority of the people speak Guaraní, and again the influence of both languages in permanent contact is easily observed. ... *Within this context, the vernacular Mby'a survives confined to the hamlet settlements of aboriginal groups. These languages, with uneven force and validity, interweave phrases, lexicon, intonations, accents, and phonetic tracks that shape the everyday life. These idiosyncratic constellations present a semiotic singularity: the migratory language constitutes a substratum with dispersed traces emerging intermittently, lingering on the different groups... It is a space of complex intercultural processes of frontiers where the official language (standard Argentinean Spanish) prevails with a massive majority of speakers legitimized by institutions (political, educational, and of the media). It has prestige: correctness in its usage is a desirable goal as well as a requirement for social mobility. However, this official language presents in its everyday production polyphony of dialectical accents and registers of an unusual plurality...*<sup>4</sup> In today's globalized world it is habitually found that two or more languages are in contact for political, economic, or geographical reasons. The result is that many countries in the world live in a situation where various languages co-exist, i.e. in a situation of multilingualism. This makes languages to be in contact with one another. The concept of languages in contact poses diverse phenomena among which linguistic interference, bilingualism, diglossia, and the appearance of pidgins and creoles could be pointed out as the most important.

<sup>3</sup> Centro de Investigaciones Históricas del Instituto Superior Antonio Ruiz de Montoya. (1988). *Historia de Misiones*. Vol. II. Page 218 Map of the Province of Misiones

<sup>4</sup> Camblong, A. (2005) *Mapa Semiótico para la alfabetización intercultural en Misiones*. Posadas. Facultad de Humanidades y ciencias sociales de la UNAM- Ministerio de Educación de la provincia de Misiones. Pp. 10,11





FIG. 1

Deep and exhaustive studies of linguistic systems in contact have detected: 1) a process of interference and incorporation of linguistic elements (morphological, phonological, syntactic or semantic); 2) a process of borrowing of linguistic elements between both languages; 3)

linguistic or conceptual enrichment of one of the systems by proximity with the other; 4) the appearance of languages in contact in frontier areas, where an interlingua or discursive mechanisms are developed.

The special geographical and sociolinguistic features of Misiones present a very particular linguistic physiognomy, which is worth analysing. Considering that much has been said and studied about the Brazilian influence and lot of research on the subject has been published, this work is devoted just to the influence of Guaraní in some areas of the province: its capital Posadas, its outskirts and some nearby areas. The work will focus on the origins of the Guaraní influence, its historic and cultural tradition. The research will try to delimit the use of the term “variety”, “dialect”, and “language”. It will present samples of the lexicon, syntax, phonetics trails, accents and intonation of the usage of the Misiones Spanish in Posadas and its environs as well as a paremiological study of the most common sayings, proverbs and refrains, being its aim to prove that the Argentinean Spanish in Posadas is not a mere dialect, derogatively speaking, but a subdivision of a particular language and so worth being accepted in official, political, social and educational ambits.

The research is qualitative as well as empirical. It is qualitative in as much part of it has been carried out in the fieldwork, in direct contact with people of the area. Recorders have not been used for they would have interfered with the natural, spontaneous utterances of the speakers; instead, notes have been taken down by a group of “aides de camp” working at all levels of society and in different places.

It must also be considered that although vast amount of material has been collected, the present work is far from being able to show the Spanish variety used in Misiones in its whole dimensions: depth, extension and width. Moreover, the mutability of the usage of a language must be taken into account, that is, all the examples and the material presented in this paper... *as frequent, systematic, generalised and well-rooted structures or lexicon might go out of use in a three-decade term. Linguistic usages are*

*inseparable from the lifestyle of an age; they are the outward expression of that lifestyle, in the same way that are, at a different level, dressing, housing, cooking, etc...*<sup>5</sup> The work is empirical for the long-term research and the numerous sources of information consulted.

It is not the aim of the present work to enter into the field of educational policies, nor into the issue of bilingualism, which have been studied in depth by well known scholars of the Universidad Nacional de Misiones, Instituto Superior Antonio Ruiz de Montoya, Universidad del Salvador, among many others, for this could deviate the reader from the main objectives of the present research. Nonetheless, it is worth quoting some excerpts that could give a general idea of the problem and its relation with the topic presented here: ... *There are about fourteen languages in force in Argentina, which have never been taken into account. It is not fortuitous that the higher level of illiteracy is found in places where the majority of inhabitants are aborigines...On revealing that teachers were not well prepared for working with diversity, Tomé explained that educators did not count with the necessary tools for doing so... Bilingual education programmes arose firstly from the government during the 1980s with the return of democracy, due to the impossibility of communication between students and teachers. Then, the term intercultural began to be used because they became aware that it was not only a question of language what was to be treated but also a question of culture...*<sup>6</sup>. On the other hand, the Guaraní in Misiones claimed that the presence of “white” teachers in the schools of the aboriginal communities or in towns with an important number of Guaraní students frequently produce a clash of cultures, beyond the commitment and effort of the teachers... *In Misiones, where there are more than sixty Guaraní settlements, I have seen white teachers who do not speak Guaraní, and the inhabitants do not speak Spanish. There, the population claims that teachers come to play with their children, and the teachers say that children do not learn. There is a clash of cultures because for us there are fundamental values, like old age...Our vision is all-embracing*

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<sup>5</sup> Amable, H. (1975) *Las Figuras el Habla Misionera*. Santa Fe. Ed. Colmegna. Pp. 10, 11.

<sup>6</sup> Gordillo, M. *Enseñanza Intercultural*. Newspaper: el territorio, September 17th, 2005. p.17

*and completely different from the occidental, thus if this fact does not account, it is very difficult to progress...*<sup>7</sup>

### **DIALECT, VARIETY, LANGUAGE?**

A dialect is commonly considered as a substandard, low status, and often rural form of language, associated with groups lacking prestige such as the peasantry and the working class. The word dialect is also applied to spoken languages in isolated parts of the world. Furthermore, ... *dialects are regarded as some kind of deviation from a norm, as aberrations of a correct or standard form of language...*<sup>8</sup>.

In this paper, and in agreement with many dialectologists, dialects are seen as a subdivision of a particular language. It is considered that all people are speakers of a dialect, that standard Argentinean Spanish, for example, is as much a dialect as any other form of Spanish, and that no dialect is in any way linguistically superior to any other. Neither the term “language”, nor the term “dialect” represents a clear concept. As far as dialect is concerned, for instance, it is possible to speak of the Argentinean Spanish or the Cuban Spanish, the Spanish spoken in South America, the one spoken in Central America or in Mexico; they are all Spanish dialects; there is no clear linguistic break between them. If we want to place a boundary between them, we will have to base our decision on geographical, social, local-government-political facts rather than on linguistic ones. On the other hand, ...*it can be stated that if two speakers of any of the different Spanish speaking countries do not understand one another, it can be said that they speak different languages, while if they do understand each other, then they are speaking dialects of the same language...*<sup>9</sup> This can be applied to the Standard Argentinean Spanish and the one spoken in Posadas. We can thus conclude that both dialects are “varieties” of the same language.

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<sup>7</sup> Oribe, C. Member of a Guaraní community. *Reclamos guaraníes en Misiones*. Op.Cit. p.17

<sup>8</sup> Chambers, J, Trudgill, P. (1980) “*Dialectology*”. England. CUP. Page 3.

<sup>9</sup> Trudgill, P. (1974). “*Sociolinguistics: an introduction*”. England. Penguin Books. pp. 14, 15, 16. 17.